

## WILLIAM MERCER BUCK

July 5, 1852—July 10, 1950

Splendent ever among the South's late living boys in gray, long a favorite for his loyalty and support within their ranks, William M. Buck is remembered today as one of Dixie's shining beacons during those last glorious years of his beloved United Confederate brethren. He goes down as one of the youngest soldiers in the war, since he was not quite thirteen when Lee surrendered. Despite his youth in Marengo County, Alabama, little Bill Buck was a valued aide to his Confederate Army as a scout. When, several months prior to the closing of the war, a unit of gray-clads camped near his farm home, the boy offered his assistance as scout. So successfully did he execute his missions that he was placed in command of a group of scouts, several of them pre-teens like himself. Probably, too, they were among the most serious soldiers of the struggle. Buck often modestly claimed his most important contribution to the South's support was helping his mother sew butternut clothing for their ragged defenders ever in need of sartorial repair.

Buck moved to Desdemona and then on west to Strawn, Texas. It was there that he left farming for carpentry and here that the twelve children were born. Mr. Buck built and furnished many of the materials for Strawn's new Baptist Church for which he was twenty-seven years superintendent of the Sunday school. It was in 1905, upon his son Joe's encouragement, that he moved to Muskogee. Today in Muskogee there are dozens of his well built houses, visible reminders of a Confederate veteran's forty-five



William M. Buck

years in skilled woodworking.

Of all the honors which came to William M. Buck during his ninety-eight years, he would state that the finest was being elected Commander-In-Chief of the U.C.V. at their Fifty-eighth Annual Reunion in October, 1948, at Montgomery, Alabama. Buck, who had been attending U.C.V. national reunions since 1918, had always made the trips on his own until 1944. However, in the later years this patriarch of the gray was always accompanied by his son, A. Lester Buck. In October, 1947, while enroute home to Muskogee from the Chattanooga U.C.V. reunion, this ninety-five-year-old Commander of the Oklahoma Division had unfortunately been injured somewhat when the car skidded and struck the curb of a bridge. Although the vehicle went over onto its side, the soldier came through with a fast recovery. In the fall of 1947 he had been one of about eighty-five living boys in gray. By the fall of 1948 he was one of a half dozen left in Oklahoma. Upon the April 26, 1949, death of John Shepherd, a Texan who lived his last four years at the Ardmore Confederate Soldiers' Home, Buck became the sole Con-

federate in his state. Those today who were privileged to be acquainted with Oklahoma's last Old Reb probably remember him much in the same way Mrs. Lee M. Buck, his daughter-in-law, did in her June 18, 1971, letter from Muskogee:

Mr. Buck was a courtly old gentleman with a keen sense of humor, a strong feeling of family closeness, proud, yet thoughtful and considerate and very independent. He was devoted to our Central Baptist Church where he attended each service as long as he was able. One incident I shall always recall was his shingling the roof of a two-story house when he was eighty-five. In spite of his small stature and age, he carried the shingles up the ladder, across the roof to the other side. There he worked until the shingling was completed on the front. All in all, it took him about two weeks. He kept the yard, as one neighbor said, "as straight and prim as an old maid's skirts." He tended the flowers, especially his roses, and raised a bounteous garden. He was a true Southerner and a staunch Democrat. "Pappy," as he insisted we call him, was my friend as well as my husband's father, and I feel my life enriched by having known him.

Whenever people sought reasons for his longevity, Buck would tell them straight out, "I never drank, never smoked or never danced in all my life. I believe in living moderately." For as long as people could remember, he had been, in Browning's words, "A happy-tempered bringer of the best."

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